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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SMIG](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: SHANGHAI REFORMING MIGRANT CHILDREN EDUCATION, BUT
CHALLENGES AWAIT

REF: A) SHANGHAI 19; B) 08 SHANGHAI 103

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Shanghai's large migrant population poses challenges for the Shanghai Government, as it tries to enact reforms of migrant children's education. Interlocutors cited the low quality of teachers, poor infrastructure, and the commercialization of migrant schools, which are run by migrant entrepreneurs, as major problems. The Shanghai Government plans to enroll all migrant children in public schools or special private schools, which are converted from migrant schools using public funds, by 2010. Interlocutors think elements of Shanghai's plan may be picked up by the Central Government in its 12-year education reform plan, but governance issues and assimilation of migrant children in public schools will remain long-term problems. The current economic downturn will also test local governments' willingness to fund some of these reforms. End summary.

Background: 12-Year Education Reform Plan

¶2. (C) According to Quan Heng, Professor at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) in August 2008 laid out a draft blueprint for education reform and development, a 12-year mid-long term plan for 2020 that addresses multiple education-related issues, including compulsory education, higher education, and education of migrant children. The MOE is currently in the process of soliciting ideas and recommendations from various institutes in China before issuing a revised 12-year plan in early-mid 2009, said our interlocutors. According to Quan, Shanghai Mayor Han Zheng, under orders from the Central Government, has tasked three institutes in Shanghai - SASS, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, and East China Normal University - to draft recommendations for educational reform. (Note: This cable focuses on Shanghai's plans to reform education of migrant children. Shanghai views on reform of higher education will be reported septel. End note.)

Large Migrant Population Poses Challenge for Shanghai

¶3. (C) The education of migrant children is particularly challenging for Shanghai because of its large migrant population, said Ling Xiaofeng, Vice Director of the Basic

Education Department at the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (SEC). Shanghai Government statistics place the number of migrant workers in Shanghai at more than 4 million. According to Ling, there are 380,000-390,000 migrant children in Shanghai, a figure comparable to Beijing's but "much larger" than other cities. Li Minghua, Associate Professor in the School of Public Administration at East China Normal University (ECNU), agreed that the migrant education issue is most prominent in Shanghai and Beijing because of their large migrant populations. Midsize cities like Ningbo (Zhejiang Province), Changzhou (Jiangsu Province), and Wuxi (Jiangsu Province) are "doing better than Shanghai" in integrating migrant children into the public education system because these cities have smaller migrant populations, said Li. In small towns and cities, there is "no real difference between locals and migrants," he added.

14. (C) Ling of the SEC thinks the migrant population in Shanghai is relatively stable, with few migrants permanently relocating to the countryside amid the economic downturn (Ref A). Li of ECNU agreed that most of Shanghai's migrants have "already been here a while" and are not a "floating population." Instead, they are likely to stay in Shanghai for the long-term and are called "migrants" only because they lack local residence registration ("huji"). He estimates that 20-30 percent of Shanghai's migrant children were born in Shanghai, and this figure will rise to 50 percent in 10 years. Furthermore, 40 percent of children born in Shanghai are migrant children without "huji," a figure likely to rise as younger migrants settle in Shanghai, adding to the local government's sense of urgency to resolve the issue of migrant children's education. Most migrants are concentrated in several suburban pockets of Shanghai, which is where most of the migrant schools are located, said Li.

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Disparity in Education Level

15. (C) Although migrant children are allowed to attend public schools, many end up going to migrant schools because Shanghai's public schools currently do not have the capacity to accept all migrant children, and public schools require many documents including residence certificates and proof of parents' employment. Li of ECNU said one of the biggest problems with migrant schools in Shanghai is the poor quality of teachers and school infrastructure (Ref B). Most teachers in migrant schools are migrants themselves, with questionable qualifications and salaries of only RMB 10,000/year (USD 1450), much lower than the public school average of RMB 60,000/year (USD 8700). Migrant schools are thus unable to attract good teachers, who tend to flock to public and private schools in the wealthier districts, said Li.

16. (C) Ling of the SEC also characterized the gap in education level between migrant and public schools as a big problem. To address this concern, the SEC conducts cross-training programs, in which experienced teachers from public schools work with migrant school teachers to raise the instructional capability of the latter. She said the SEC currently provides RMB 500,000 (USD 72,500) a year to 20 public schools from the inner districts for this program, but its efforts are hindered by the limited number of public school teachers.

"Educational Industrialization"

17. (C) Migrant schools in Shanghai are too commercialized, argued Quan Heng of SASS, leading to "educational industrialization" - the business of education. Li of ECNU likewise thinks commercialization is the root cause of the poor quality of migrant schools. He said migrant schools in Shanghai are operated privately by business entrepreneurs, most of whom are migrants themselves. They run these migrant schools for profit, "like running a factory," said Li, charging migrant students RMB 1000-1500 (USD 145-220) tuition per year and keeping costs low through the hiring of low-quality teachers.

Although most migrant schools have governance structures with school boards, most board members are chosen by the entrepreneur, who remains the final decision-maker. These entrepreneurs are "sophisticated businesspeople" who often flout local safety and governance regulations through bribery and corruption, said Li.

Shanghai Government's Reform Efforts

18. (C) The Shanghai Government announced plans in January 2008 to reform education of migrant children, even before the launch of the 12-year reform plan. According to the SEC, the Shanghai Government aims to increase the enrollment of Shanghai's migrant children in public schools and infuse public money into migrant schools, converting them into higher quality private schools (Ref B). Sixty percent of migrant children in Shanghai are currently enrolled in public schools, up from 40 percent a couple of years ago, said Li of ECNU. Of the 258 migrant schools in Shanghai, 66 were converted into private schools in 2008, according to Ling of the SEC. The SEC hopes to move all migrant children into public schools or converted private schools by 2010. These converted private schools are given RMB 1500 (USD 220) per year per student in public subsidies (plus additional subsidies for books and other educational expenses, the amount varying across districts) and must meet certain requirements regarding teachers' qualifications and adequacy of facilities in order to qualify for public funds, said Ling. Li of ECNU thinks this reform is "very good," since it would theoretically raise the quality of these schools and free migrant children from having to pay tuition (converted private schools are not supposed to charge tuition if they accept public funds). Li thinks this idea of using public money to sponsor private schools for migrants can eventually influence migrant education systems throughout China.

Problems of Governance and Assimilation

19. (C) Although the reforms are good in principle, problems remain in the implementation, said Li. The 66 converted private schools are still run by the same entrepreneurs who ran the original migrant schools. Although they may increase teachers' salaries and improve the school's infrastructure, these entrepreneurs "are businessmen and not educators," raising

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questions of whether they will adequately address the educational needs of their students, he argued. Li proposes that these converted private schools be run as "community schools," with school boards that include "local stakeholders," such as parents, businesses, and government.

110. (C) Another problem cited by both Li and Ling of the SEC is the assimilation of migrant children in public schools. If given a choice of attending public or migrant schools, many migrant children choose to attend migrant schools since they feel more comfortable surrounded by others of a similar background. Migrant children also face discrimination in public schools, according to Li. Although the Central Government and Shanghai Government want to place local and migrant children in the same public school classrooms, he explained, public school principals want to separate them in different classes since they are afraid that migrant children will "lower the level" of the classroom and test scores. "It will take time" for migrant children to feel comfortable in the local culture and for migrant parents to gain awareness of their children's rights in public schools, said Li.

Comment

111. (C) Our interlocutors believe Shanghai is at the forefront of educational reform in China, stating that the Central Government may pick up elements of Shanghai's reform of migrant children's education in its 12-year education reform plan. However, they were also careful to point out the hurdles in implementing many of these reforms. One interlocutor noted that, although the Central Government is the driving force

behind the 12-year plan, the cost of reform will largely be borne by local governments. It is unclear if local government commitment to educational reform will remain robust amid the current economic downturn.

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